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The Assist

Helping to Improve Access to and Progress in the General Curriculum

February 2002

Volume 1, No. 4

MI-Access Staff Is Here to Help

Dear Readers,

As you well know, the Winter 2002 MI-Access assessment window is almost here. Before the assessment is administered, however, I would like to take a minute to thank you for your efforts thus far in making MI-Access, Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program, a success.

I know you are all very busy and have other important and equally demanding challenges facing you on a daily basis. I also understand how difficult it can be when someone foists a new and complex responsibility on your shoulders.

Fortunately, Michigan has extremely qualified professionals working on this Program. I have been continually impressed with the high caliber of people attending the MI-Access District Coordinator training sessions and with the intelligent and insightful questions I receive daily about MI-Access. It shows me that educators in Michigan are committed to doing what is best for their students and administering the new assessment to the best of their ability.

We also have dedicated contractors and advisory committees working with the Department to make MI-Access succeed. They have put in long hours with us over the past year, developing materials, programs, and assessments that are of high quality despite incredibly tight time frames.

Given what I have seen in the office and out in districts, I am convinced that together, we can make MI-Access work. Certainly there will be bumps and barriers along the way. But I have heard many teachers and

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A Reminder Regarding Federal Reporting Requirements

With the MEAP and MI-Access assessments quickly approaching, a reminder is in order about student reporting requirements. As explained in the October 2001 issue of *The Assist*, IDEA 97 requires that states report assessment results for *all* students with disabilities—regardless of how they are assessed.

Existing MEAP and MI-Access reporting forms provided data on students taking the MEAP, MEAP with accommodations, MI-Access Participation or MI-Access Supported Independence. But, for those students for whom a statewide, standardized assessment does not exist, there was no reporting mechanism. As a result, a new form has been developed.

Arriving this year with MI-Access assessment materials will be the new form called the **Determined by IEP Team (Not Participation or Supported Independence) Scannable Form**. Teachers need to complete the form for every student with an IEP who does not participate in any of the current state assessments (MEAP, MEAP with accommodations, MI-Access Participation, or MI-Access Supported Independence). Detailed instructions for completing the form are included in both the printed and CD-ROM versions of the Winter 2002 MI-Access Coordinator/Administration Manual.

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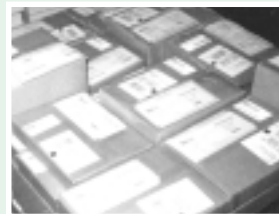
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Funded by the Michigan Department of
Education and the U.S. Office of Special
Education.

NOTES FROM THE CONTRACTOR

Assessment Materials have been shipped



808 school districts. Over 1,500 boxes. Nearly 4 tons of materials in all!

As the assessment window for the Winter 2002 administration of MI-Access nears, our warehouse has been busy! Please check your orders. All District MI-Access Coordinators who supplied us with student counts should have received:

- One complete set of materials in a "District Coordinator Sample Packet" to use for reference during the assessment window
- Packing slip listing materials shipped (secured to the outside, top of the box)
- Pre-paid Authorized Return Shipment (A.R.S.) label(s) for UPS
- *Return of Materials Instruction Sheet* (fluorescent yellow)
- *District ID Sheet and Order for Scoring Services* (gray)
- *School ID Sheets* (green)
- *MI-Access Coordinator/Administration Manuals* (hard copies and CD-ROMs)
- *Teacher Identification Sheets* (blue/maroon scan sheets)
- Student assessment booklets (Participation and Supported Independence)
- *Student Observation Sheets* (Participation and Supported

Independence)

- *Determined by IEP Team (Not Participation or Supported Independence) Scannable Forms* (charcoal)
- Student Identification Labels (pre-printed with District Codes)
- *Teacher Feedback Forms* (yellow)
- Plastic bags for *Teacher Feedback Forms*
- *Teacher Return Envelopes*
- MI-Access No. 2 pencils

Use the packing slip to inventory your materials. If materials are missing or there are insufficient quantities, use the *MI-Access Additional Materials Request Form*, found in the back of the Coordinator/Administration Manual, to place an order for more. Once your form is complete, fax it to BETA/TASA at 845-277-8142 and we'll see that you receive the additional materials needed.

Remember: The MI-Access assessment window is February 18 – March 29, 2002 and all materials must be shipped to us no later than April 12, 2002.

MI-Access Staff Is Here to Help

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administrators say that—once they had administered MI-Access in their classrooms, schools, and districts—the bumps started to smooth out. The assessment made more sense, they had fewer questions and concerns, and they even had ideas about how to improve the process in the future.

So, as all of us move forward, keep in mind that the MI-Access staff is here to help. If you have any questions at all, you may e-mail me at dutcherp@mi.gov or Frank

McClelland, Special Education Consultant, at mccllellandf@mi.gov. And don't forget...all assessment materials must be shipped back to the MI-Access contractor by no later than April 12, 2002.

Good luck in February and March.

Peggy Dutcher
MI-Access Project Director
E-mail: dutcherp@mi.gov

Check it out!

The assessment component of the
Office of Special Education and Early
Intervention Services' Web site

www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped

Federal Reporting Requirements

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Federal language from IDEA 97 regarding this requirement is as follows:

Section 34 CFR § 300.139 "requires States to report to the Secretary and to the public every two years on the progress of the State and of the children with disabilities in the State toward meeting performance goals including performance on assessments, drop-out rates, and graduation rates. Additionally, 34 CFR §300.139 requires the State Education Agency (SEA) to report to the public, in the same frequency and detail as it reports for non-disabled children, on the number and performance results of children with disabilities participating in regular and alternate assessments and to include in those reports aggregated data that include the participation of children with disabilities together with all other children and disaggregated data on the performance of children with disabilities."

Completion of the ***Determined by IEP Team (Not Participation or Supported Independence) Scannable Form*** is an important part of our statewide assessment system because it provides MDE with valuable information on the number of students participating in alternate assessment and the types of assessments in which they are participating. If districts require more forms than are shipped with the assessment materials, District MI-Access Coordinators may contact the MI-Access contractor (BETA/TASA) by phone (at 1-888-382-4246) or by e-mail (at mi-access@tasa.com) for additional forms.



Impressions from the Classroom ...

By Tracy Sobecki, Teacher, Macomb ISD

When I first heard of the state special education assessment (MI-Access), I was very skeptical. At that time I was a teacher for the Severely Mentally Impaired (SMI), and I wondered just what the people in Lansing would come up with for assessment questions.

I have since learned that the assessment activities ("questions") were, in fact, developed by educators in the field—many of whom were teachers. I was also informed that each assessment item was subjected to a lengthy, ongoing process of review that involved a variety of specialized committees. Even this year, the review process resulted in numerous revisions as a result of input from many different people with varying perspectives and backgrounds.

Last year, when the state assessment finally arrived at my school, I was teaching a Trainable Mentally Impaired (TMI) class. I was less than thrilled with the concept of assessing my TMI students with a statewide assessment. By the time our school received assessment booklets and got to watch the training video, we were already well into the assessment window. I then learned that there were only two weeks left to assess nine of my students. IEP's for my students were also scheduled during the same period. Time and scheduling became a problem. It took the whole two weeks to assess all my students and could have taken longer. This year our school hopes to take better advantage of the entire six-week assessment window, which should help with scheduling conflicts and assessment time requirements.

Last year in our school, training to administer the assessment consisted only of a short meeting and a video. I left the training feeling confused and unprepared. Fortunately, one of my fellow teachers had been involved in the development of MI-Access. This teacher became a great resource for answering questions about the assessment process.



Tracy Sobecki

I have been assured that the training and resources for this year's assessment will be much more comprehensive, which should have a positive impact on the process. Better training and the availability of more resources—people and materials—will certainly help.

Last year I found that some of the assessment activities did not fit the routine and structure of my classroom. Further, some of us were not clear on the intent of the wording for some activities. I understand that, this year, the assessment activities have been reviewed to clarify language and application concerns. This too should help us with administering the assessment.

Last year the reporting of the assessment results did show some progress with my students, but I am not yet sure what, if anything, was significant about the results. Many of my peers are concerned about the subjectivity of the assessment. We are also concerned about what exactly the assessment is assessing: Students? Teachers? Buildings? Programs?

I have learned that information about results and how to use them will be readily available this year—including more detailed reporting procedures. My hope is that, as information about and experience with the MI-Access assessments become more common, these concerns will be less troublesome.

We, in the classrooms, still have many questions about a statewide special education assessment. But we also are encouraged to hear how field experience and input has effected—and improved—MI-Access. Although we bring a healthy dose of skepticism to the process, we also are encouraged that the avenues for input have been kept open. Further, we have high hopes that the winter 2002 administration of MI-Access will have a positive impact on the programs and services we provide our students.

Some Unexpected Benefits of MI-Access

By David Phillips, Special Education Supervisor, Port Huron Area School District

Initially, when I received news that the Port Huron School District was going to participate in the Winter 2001 administration of Michigan's newly designed alternate assessment, I was quite skeptical. I wondered what additional materials the district might have to purchase and how teachers would work the new assessment into their already busy school days. The teachers in our district also wondered what new tasks would be added to their crowded schedules.

Now, nearly a year after our first experience with MI-Access, I fully believe that the opportunity to participate in the assessment has given me, and our teachers, a chance to explore new and exciting approaches to assessment and education. This all occurred with virtually no added cost to the district and with minimal impact on student and staff schedules.

In addition, the district experienced a few unanticipated benefits. For example, teach-

ers found that they could assess students by observing tasks that occurred naturally during the school day. Mrs. Rashid, a teacher of students with Mental Impairments (MI) at Garfield Elementary School, stated that she had to spend far too much time modifying teaching materials so they would be appropriate for her students. She thought MI-Access was a nice change since it was designed specifically for her students and the content she teaches.



David Phillips

This year, teachers of Trainable Mentally Impaired (TMI), Educable Mentally Impaired (EMI), and

Physically but Otherwise Healthy Impaired (POHI) students from our district met for the first time to look at the new training video for Phase 1 MI-Access assessments. Some of these teachers were participants in the Winter 2001 implementation and others were either not part of the assessment thus far or were new to the district. It was an exciting day because, after the MI-Access

training was completed, the teachers began to discuss other issues tangentially raised by the training video—issues they all dealt with in the classroom but had not had an opportunity to discuss. They talked about curriculum, progress-reporting formats for parents, and transition issues. "This meeting gave us a chance to really talk, for the first time all year, about many important issues," said Sue Manuilow, a teacher of students with Mental Impairments at Garfield Elementary School.

As I observed their discussions it became apparent to me that MI-Access training sessions can be a powerful forum for discussing and sharing ideas—something that is rare in the hectic world of teachers.

Further, this process has given me, as the MI-Access District Coordinator, the opportunity to discuss and problem solve with other administrators, particularly those involved with the MEAP assessment, in new ways. As Jennifer Allen, an Elementary Curriculum Supervisor in Port Huron Area Schools states, "With new collaboration comes more information and this leads to better informed decisions being made in regard to planning and implementing

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Are MI-Access Assessments Valid?

When developing a new assessment, one must always be concerned with the "validity" of the instrument being developed. For that reason, validation was an integral component of the rigorous process used by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop MI-Access.

Validity, or validation, answers the question of whether a test effectively measures what it is supposed to measure. It refers to the degree of appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences made from the test results.

According to *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA-APA-

NCME, 1985, updated 1999), there are three basic types of validity: (1) content validity, (2) criterion validity, and (3) construct validity.

As you may know, the Phase 1 MI-Access assessments are based on the Performance Expectations contained in *Addressing the Unique Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities* (AUEN). These expectations were approved by the State Board of Education in 1998 as the framework upon which Michigan's alternate assessments would be based.

Because the Phase 1 MI-Access assessments are achievement assessments—that is, they are used to assess student performance on

specific AUEN Performance Expectations at selected ages—the type of validity that is most relevant to Phase 1 MI-Access is "content validity."

To verify content validity, the MDE needed to be sure that the assessment activities matched the Performance Expectations contained in the test blueprint or assessment plan. (Like all published achievement tests, the Phase 1 MI-Access assessments have an assessment plan or blueprint that indicates the Performance Expectations to be assessed.)

There are a number of ways assessment activities can measure Performance

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Phase 2 MI-Access —Status Report

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

It cannot be said enough. One of the primary keys to MI-Access success is *communication*. Because MI-Access is new and involves emotionally charged issues—such as special education, testing, and accountability—it is imperative that all of us work together to get the word out about the assessment, its components, and its potential value to students.

Whether you are a district or school administrator, a District MI-Access Coordinator, a School MI-Access Coordinator, a teacher, a psychologist, a public relations specialist, or any other professional involved in the assessment process, there are several things you need to keep in mind as the MI-Access assessment window draws near.

- ✓ There are a variety of audiences (parents, teachers, administrators, the press, and so forth) with whom you will be sharing information. Unfortunately, they all have slightly different information needs and levels of understanding. For that reason, you will need to tailor your MI-Access communication materials and messages to your specific audiences.
- ✓ The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has model materials that may be of help. Sample contact lists, internal briefing memos, press releases, parent letters, fact sheets, and brochures have been developed for your modification and use. These materials were provided to every District MI-Access Coordinator via e-mail January 2002.
- ✓ Keep communication materials as simple and straightforward as possible. Eliminate jargon, use simple words, be concise, use bullets where appropriate, and confine your materials to 3-5 key messages.

✓ At a minimum, try to answer four basic questions: What is MI-Access? Why was it developed? Who determines which assessment a student will take? And what does the assessment involve? Then, prepare more in-depth communication materials for those who want more information.

✓ Before the assessment window arrives, develop clear lines of communication or “communication protocols” within your school or district. Know ahead of time who you want parents, teachers, administrators, and most importantly the press, to call with questions. Then inform everyone—including those who answer the telephones—about the protocol you have developed.

As with any new program, there will be many questions and concerns about MI-Access. You probably will have to answer the same questions over and over as people become familiar with the new program. But keep in mind, the better you communicate with various audiences this year, the easier it will be when MI-Access rolls around in 2003.

Each year you can cultivate a deeper level of understanding in your school, district, and community if you (1) arm yourself with accurate information now, (2) develop effective communication messages, and (3) establish clear lines of communication. And, ultimately, we need to help people remember that the purpose of MI-Access is not to add yet another responsibility to teachers’ already busy schedules or to give administrators one more task. Instead, it is designed to make sure that students with disabilities have a legitimate opportunity to demonstrate what they can do and enable them to count in the Michigan Educational Assessment System.

The development of Phase 2 MI-Access Functional Independence assessments is well underway. The assessments are intended for students in grades 4, 5, 7, 8 and 11 whose IEP Teams have determined that the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), the MEAP with assessment accommodations, MI-Access Supported Independence, or MI-Access Participation is not appropriate.

The rigorous process being used to develop Phase 2 assessments is similar to that used to develop Phase 1 assessments (Participation and Supported Independence). It involves acquiring significant input from numerous committees comprised of Michigan stakeholders, including parents, classroom teachers, administrators, ancillary staff and assessment experts.

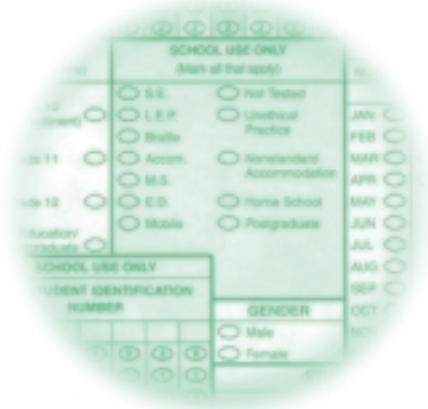
In addition, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will conduct focus groups to obtain additional information related to the instruction received by students who will likely participate in Phase 2 assessments.

The information obtained from the committees and the focus groups will be used—along with the *Addressing the Unique Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities* Functional Independence document—to design a draft Phase 2 MI-Access assessment blueprint. The draft blueprint will then be disseminated to local and intermediate school districts and professional organizations for review and comment.

The tentative schedule for implementing Phase 2 MI-Access assessments is as follows: (1) Item writing and review will take place in summer 2002; (2) committees will review the items written in early fall 2002; and (3) Phase 2 tryouts will take place in a representative sample of schools in spring 2003. If all goes according to schedule, the MI-Access Functional Independence assessments will be ready for statewide administration in winter 2005.

MEAP! What do I Bubble in on the MEAP Student Scan Sheets?

Every year schools are asked to provide important information in the "School Use Only" section of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) student answer documents. This section provides information needed by the state, districts, and schools for various programs. It also provides data needed to comply with the federal reporting mandates prescribed in Title 1 and IDEA 97. For these reasons, it is extremely important that schools accurately complete the requested information.



that he/she possesses. This oval pertains to Section 504, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and special education students.

Not Tested: There are specific criteria in the Winter 2002 MEAP Coordinator/Administration Manual that describe when this bubble should be used. For example, one time to use this oval is when a student's IEP Team determined that the MEAP, even with assessment accommodations, is not appropriate.

Following is a description of the ovals within the "School Use Only" section of the MEAP answer documents that pertain specifically to students with disabilities. Only a school staff member should fill in the "School Use Only" section *after* testing is complete. (If you would like to read the entire text for the "School Use Only" section of the MEAP answer document it can be viewed at <http://www.meritaward.state.mi.us/>.)

Special Education (S.E.): The "S.E." oval must be filled in for any person under 26 years of age who is determined by an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Team or by a hearing officer to have a disability, as defined in the Michigan

Administrative Rules (R340.1703-R340.1715), that necessitates special education. This oval must be filled in if the student has an IEP, not just if the student is using an assessment accommodation.

Braille: The "Braille" oval must be filled in if a student uses the Braille edition of the MEAP test.

Accommodations (Accom.): The "Accom." oval must be filled in for any student for whom a testing provision is made. Provisions are made so that (1) the effects of a student's disability are minimized, and (2) so that the student has an opportunity to demonstrate the true degree of achievement

Nonstandard Accommodation: The "Nonstandard Accommodation" oval must be filled in on the answer document for any student who receives a nonstandard accommodation on that test. (See the 9/22/01 updated version of "Students with Disabilities and the MEAP, MEAP with Assessment Accommodation, or Alternate Assessment" posted on the MDE/OSE/EIS Web site. You may access it at www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped/.)

Knowing what these ovals are and how and when they should be filled in should help school personnel as they administer MEAP assessments to students with disabilities.

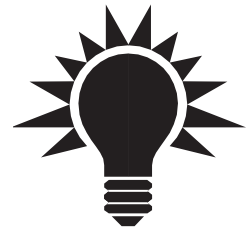
Unexpected Benefits of MI-Access

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assessments." As a result of my new interaction with MEAP administrators, I now receive MEAP updates regularly and often check pertinent Web sites. In return, I regularly provide our MEAP coordinators with updates on MEAP and MI-Access as they relate to students with disabilities. Later this month I will even be attending a meeting with all of the MEAP building coordinators to help address questions they may have regarding MI-Access. By working together, we now will be better prepared to implement the tests. I believe in this type of collaboration because it enables us to ask more focused questions as a group and, thus, have more credibility and reliability when we present information to parents and teachers.

Although many of the by-products of the MI-Access program I have mentioned have little to do with the assessment itself, they have much to do with the meaningful collaboration that is desperately needed among educators. I believe collaboration is key to continuous school improvement, and it is one of the goals of both state and federal assessment mandates. The ongoing collaboration that resulted from MI-Access has also helped Port Huron Area Schools be better organized and better prepared to enter into the next step of the MI-Access program—the winter 2002 full implementation of the *MI-Access Participation* and *MI-Access Supported Independence* assessments.

IDEAS



SUGGESTIONS

If you have ideas, suggestions, or tips you would like to see included in *The Assist*, send them to mi-access@tasa.com.

TIPS

Are MI-Access Assessments Valid?

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Expectations. One way, is to develop a bank of assessment activities that include both “easy” and “difficult” activities in order to balance the difficulty level of the assessment. This is the route the MDE chose to take. The assessment activities selected for inclusion in the MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence assessment booklets are intended to be a representative sample of all of the possible activities that align with our assessment plan. Thus, for a student to perform well on the MI-Access assessments, he/she must have experienced the entire domain of Performance Expectations, not simply bits and pieces of it.

The development and review process for the MI-Access assessments includes several committees that address validity from a variety of perspectives. A Sensitivity Review Committee verifies that the assessment activities do not contain any sensitive or biased content that may inadvertently disadvantage any particular group of students with disabilities.

The Content Advisory Committee, which is comprised primarily of classroom teachers but also includes teacher consultants, parents, special education administrators and curriculum coordinators, verifies that each MI-Access assessment activity reflects the Performance Expectation it was supposed to measure and that the activity accurately reflects the assessment plan. The collective judgment of these two broad-based committees ensures that the MI-Access assessments have content validity.

As mentioned earlier, there are two other types of validity that psychometricians are often concerned with: criterion validity and construct validity. The element of criterion validity that is most familiar refers to whether a test can predict a student’s future performance. For example, the ACT and the SAT are used to predict whether a high school student is likely to succeed in college; therefore, criterion validity is important for these two tests.

The publishers of the ACT and the SAT conduct studies to correlate test scores with college grades to ensure they are valid.

Prediction is not, however, the purpose of the MI-Access assessments. Instead, the purpose is to collect information on a student’s *current* level of performance on the AUEN Performance Expectations being assessed. To establish criterion validity, the MI-Access assessments would have to be correlated with some other existing measure of student performance. Unfortunately, very few published assessments are based on the same construct being measured by the MI-Access assessments.

Construct validity is concerned with parts (or dimensions) of a test and whether or not they relate to the construct under study in the assessment. In other words, it is intended to show if assessment activities fit into particular strands. For example, a construct validity analysis could answer the question of whether all the “Managing Personal Work Assignments” activities in an assessment are most strongly related to one another or if one assessment activity fits better with the “Interacting with Others” assessment activities. This type of validity is not particularly relevant to MI-Access because each Performance Expectation is considered an individual dimension. For that reason, the results of all MI-Access Performance Expectations and all decisions made from these results are based on the scores of each Performance Expectation and not on an aggregate assessment, or strand, score.

The dilemma of whether to estimate construct validity on the basis of the total score or upon individual Performance Expectation scores is one with which psychometricians (including those in the MI-Access program) constantly struggle. The MI-Access staff contracts and consults with a Technical Advisory Committee, comprised of nationally known psychometricians, which offers advice on such issues. The MI-Access staff has always followed, and will continue to follow, current psychometric practice in developing, administering, analyzing, and scoring MI-Access. In addition, the MDE recognizes that the collection and presentation of validity information is not “all-or-none;” therefore, data collection activities related to MI-Access will be ongoing.

GLOSSARY



ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATION:

An adjustment or adaptation in an assessment procedure, which is intended to minimize the impact of a student’s disability on his/her performance on the assessment. It should give the student with a disability an equal opportunity but NOT give the student an unfair advantage over other students. Decisions regarding accommodations should be made on an individual, case-by-case basis, and should be based on the relative appropriateness to a disability and the impact the disability has on the student. The IEP Team, well in advance of the actual assessment, should make decisions about accommodations.

STANDARD ACCOMMODATION: A standard assessment accommodation is one that does not change the construct the assessment is measuring. If a student uses standard assessment accommodations, the score on that assessment will be eligible for Michigan Merit Award or endorsement purposes (2001-2002). Detailed descriptions of these accommodations can be found in the updated Q & A available on the MDE Web site: www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped.

NON-STANDARD ACCOMMODATION: A non-standard accommodation is an accommodation that changes the construct the assessment is measuring. As a result, the scores achieved using a non-standard accommodation are not valid. If a student uses non-standard assessment accommodations, the score on that assessment will NOT be eligible for Michigan Merit Award or endorsement purposes (2001-2002). More information is available at the Web site referenced above.

The Assist

Important MI-Access Dates

MI-Access Assessment Window
February 18 – March 29, 2002

Standard Setting Meetings
April 8-11, 2002

MI-Access Materials Shipped to Contractor
by April 12, 2002

Standard Setting Committee Review
April 15-18, 2002



Bookmark these Web sites:

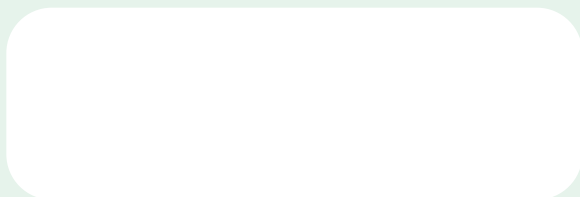
www.ncme.org

www.ncbe.gwu.edu/library/assess.htm

www.melg.org/maisa/

www.meritaward.state.mi.us

This newsletter related to the assessment of students with disabilities is distributed to local and intermediate superintendents, directors of special education, MI-Access Coordinators, MEAP Coordinators, school principals, Parent Advisory Committees, and institutes of higher education. The Assist may also be downloaded from the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services Web site. www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped.



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